



3-8 DISCOVER Prairie Dogs

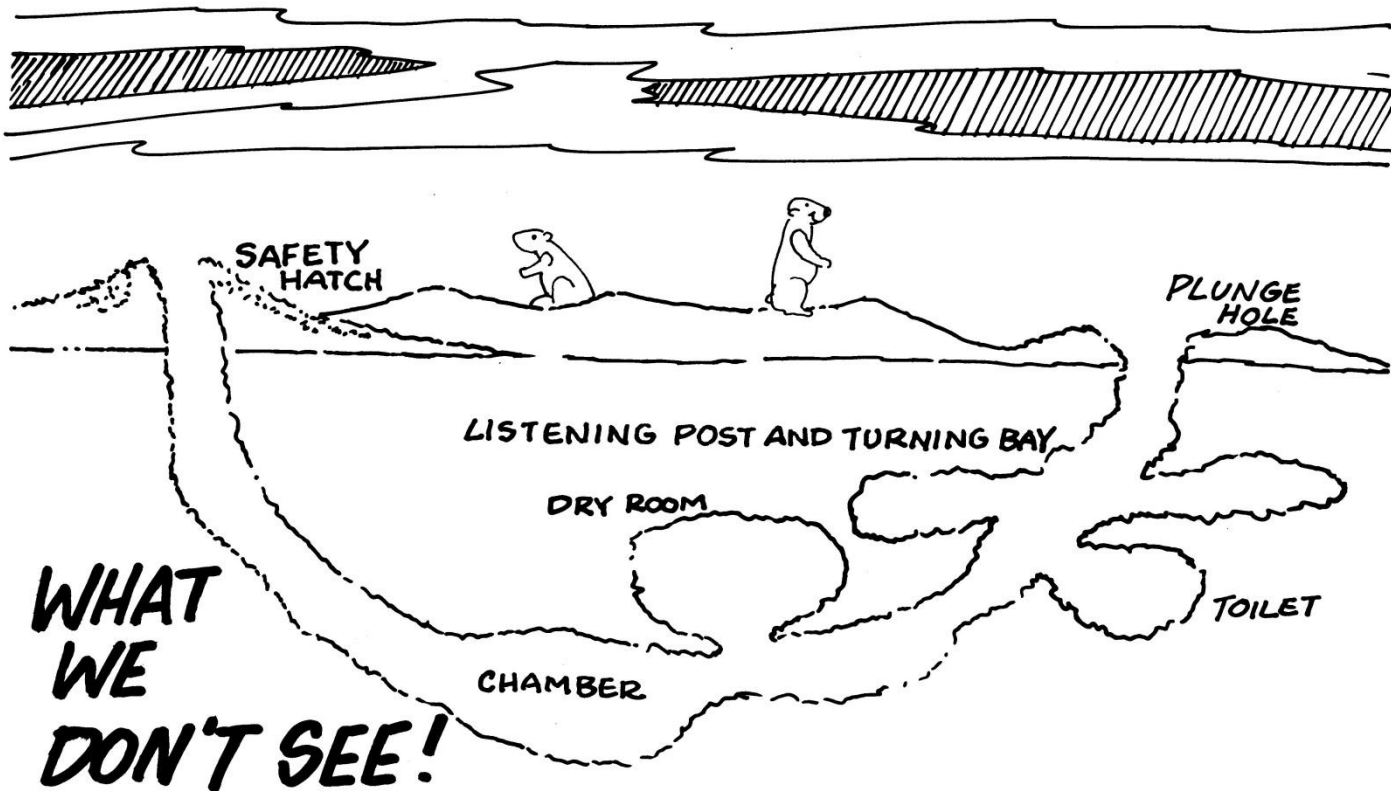
Prairie Dog Town

Did you ever wonder where prairie dogs got their name? It is curious because they do not resemble a dog at all! Prairie dogs are rodents and they belong to the squirrel family. At one time, there were many more prairie dogs than found today. Now, the animals thrive best in protected areas such as Devils Tower National Monument.

Prairie dogs are very sociable and live together in an area referred to as a town. The members of the town live in underground burrows. Several prairie dogs belong to a social group, called a **coterie**. Usually there is an adult male, three or four females, and several young members of one coterie. However, as many as thirty-nine members have been discovered.

A burrow contains many chambers. These include a listening post (close to the surface), toilet, multi-chambered living room, and a dry room. The dry room is above the living chamber and is used when the living area becomes wet due to a storm.

Insects and animals may use a deserted burrow for their home because the humidity and temperature are fairly constant and snakes may use the burrow to escape the summer heat.





Young prairie dogs are born in the Spring. They remain in the burrow and nurse for about six to seven weeks. During May or June, the pups leave the security of the burrow to explore their new surroundings. The young must learn many things about their world, such as what food to eat, how to protect themselves, and how to build a burrow.

You can help protect prairie dogs by not feeding them. The salt and preservatives added to human food can upset the prairie dog's natural water and salt balance. This might cause the prairie dogs to get very sick. They can also starve in the winter if they are accustomed to being fed by humans during the busy summer months.

You must never reach into a burrow because rattlesnakes sometimes use them to escape the summer heat. Either a rattlesnake or a prairie dog might bite you.

Remember that it is important not to disturb prairie dogs so that future generations may enjoy watching a natural, healthy prairie dog town.

LET'S DRAW A PRAIRIE DOG!

